GEN/NAR/64/CONF.2/12
29 October 1964

ENGLISH
Original: ENGLISH/SPANISH

INTER-AMERICAN CONSULTATIVE GROUP
ON COCA LEAF PROBLEMS

La Paz, 16 - 26 November 1964

WORK OF THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON COCA LEAF PROBLEMS
WHICH MET IN LIMA FROM 26 NOVEMBER TO 7 DECEMBER 1962

For the convenience of participants, the principal passages of the report on the meeting of the Consultative Group on Coca Leaf Problems (Lima, November/December 1962) are reproduced overleaf.

GE.64-14083

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1. The principal aim of the Group was to enable the Government officials present to study the various aspects of the coca leaf problem and to exchange their experiences on the social and economic problems arising from the cultivation and chewing of coca leaf, with a view to the implementation of a government policy for the progressive reduction of coca leaf chewing, and measures to improve living conditions and foster economic development. A detailed agenda, showing all the items discussed by the Consultative Group, is given in annex I.

2. Fourteen documents were prepared for the Group by the United Nations Secretariat. In addition, papers were submitted by participants from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Three documents were distributed by the observers from the United States Bureau of Narcotics. These documents are listed in annex II.

3. The participants also received copies of the opening addresses by the Ministers of Public Health of Peru, General Victor Solano Castro, and Bolivia, Dr. Guillermo Jauregui Guachalla, and of the closing speeches by Dr. Carlos Quirós Salinas, Chairman, and Dr. Guillermo Vasco.

4. At the end of its closing meeting on 7 December 1962, the Consultative Group expressed its warm appreciation to the Government of Peru and to the United Nations for their part in the organization of the meeting, to the officers of the Group, to the specialized agencies and to the United Nations Scientific Consultant, Dr. Marcel Granier-Doyeux. Special appreciation was expressed for the hospitality and the many facilities so generously extended to the participants in Peru.

5. The resolutions adopted by the Group are reproduced in annex III.

6. Coca leaf chewing, although already practised at the time of the Incas, became a mass problem in the Andean region only after the Spanish conquest. Since then, it has become an important element in the working of the hierarchically organized society established by the conquerors. From that time on, until rather recent times, it has generally or at least very widely been held that coca leaf chewing is indispensable under the economic, social, ethnic and climatic conditions of the highland population; but already in an early period there were some disinterested voices which pointed to the harmful effects of the chewing and demanded its prohibition. In fact, an early Spanish king attempted to enforce such a measure, but he succeeded only in a limited part of the affected highland region; he had to retreat where strong vested, particularly mining, interests forced such action.

7. The whole history of the problem can principally be explained by this existence of powerful groups motivated by what they considered their interests, guided by prejudice and self-deception and hostile to reform. This does not mean that the people in question, although in error, were not arguing in good faith. All this has, of course, been facilitated by the complexity of the problem.

8. The Consultative Group attempted a comprehensive review of the problem of coca leaf chewing. Since it was guided by the consideration that the chewing as a mass phenomenon constituted only a particular aspect of the economic and social problems of the Highland Indians, its discussions represented in fact a rather comprehensive seminar on the economic and social development of the affected Andean region. The papers submitted to the Group and listed in this report give some indication of the wide substantive scope and variety of subjects considered by the Seminar. The existing situation was surveyed and remedial measures were suggested. The quantitative and geographic aspects of the problem were reviewed. Medical (including, in particular, pharmacological), economic, sociological, anthropological, educational, political, legal, administrative, and other questions were expertly discussed.

9. It is not intended and it would indeed be unfeasible to summarize in this report the discussion of all subjects which were studied by the Group in its extensive review of the problems of economic and social development of the Andean region in general, and of the coca leaf in particular. A few points may, however, be indicated which guided the Group in adopting its recommendations.

10. It was unanimously agreed that coca leaf chewing was a harmful habit which should be abolished. This does, however, not mean that all pharmacological problems involved were solved; the Group did not express an agreed opinion on the quantities of cocaine which were absorbed by the chewers or on the exact physiological processes by which this was done.

11. The Group was aware that the habitual chewing of the coca leaf differs from addiction to morphine and morphine-like drugs in that the chewing does not cause real physical dependence. Whether the coca leaf or cocaine was to be considered addiction-producing depended on the terminology used. Under the definition of the World Health Organization, coca leaf chewing may be referred to as a kind of addiction. It was, however, noted that other scientific definitions required the element of physical dependence and thus did not cover the chewing.

21. It was agreed that this question of terminology was not really important. What was essential was that there was no doubt that coca leaf chewing, although different from morphine addiction, was harmful and should be abolished.

22. It was also the general consensus that not all elements of the aetiology of the chewing were clarified. It was therefore recommended that the governments principally concerned should undertake epidemiological studies of the habit. It was, however, agreed that such studies should not delay the measures taken or to be taken with a view to the abolition of the chewing within the shortest possible period. Such studies may, however, facilitate an improvement of the methods adopted towards this end.

23. There was also consensus that only relatively few chewers were influenced by neurotic or psychopathic conditions such as those which were the principal cause of drug addiction in an industrialized society. The chewing was generally a response to the very difficult economic, social and harsh climatic conditions under which the highland Indians lived. It removes hunger, kills the appetite, and enables the endurance of great physical strain. These qualities of the leaf must appear very attractive in poor regions which have an unfavourable climate, generally a soil not very suitable for agriculture, primitive means of transportation, and which produce insufficient quantities of food; but these seemingly attractive qualities of the coca leaf are even more damaging to the health, productive capacity and life expectancy of the chewer than the continuous intake of cocaine. A vicious circle thus arises. The lack of adequate food frequently causes the chewing which, in turn, reduces the productive capacity of the chewer and prevents him from earning enough to enable his adequate nutrition. The coca leaf problem is thus basically an economic and social question. Since economic and social development is already on more general grounds a necessity for the Andean regions and for the countries concerned as a whole, the chewing constitutes only a particular aspect of this serious problem.

24. The problem is economic because it can safely be expected that by improvement of the economic conditions and in particular of the living standard of the affected population, the incidence of coca leaf chewing can be radically reduced. It is, however, also economic in several other ways. A relatively large number of people derive their livelihood from the cultivation of the coca bush or from the

trade in the leaves. Substitute earning facilities must be created for those people if and when the production of and the trade in the leaves is progressively limited to medical, scientific and other legitimate needs in accordance with the gradual abolition of the chewing. Without such substitution not only the people engaged in the cultivation of the bush or in the coca leaf trade would suffer, but the national economy as a whole might seriously be affected by the repercussions, on other trades, of the loss of income of a considerable part of the population. Creation of substitute earning facilities, however, would also be a very important part of the process of economic development leading to an increased living standard of the whole population of the Andean regions and thus to an essential reduction of the number of chewers.

Considerable revenue is also received by some governments from the coca leaf. Substitute sources of public income would have to be found.

16. Various economic measures were considered which would facilitate the radical reduction of coca bush cultivation resulting from the abolition of the chewing and the raising of the living standards of the highland Indians practising and chewing.

17. Many crops were considered which could be substituted for the coca bush. It was pointed out that it was important that the substitute crop would have to be equally or even more profitable than the coca bush. The need for improving the roads and generally the transportation facilities was noted in this connexion. The question of marketing was considered. It was mentioned that coca bush cultivation often led to soil erosion and that the bush was often grown on poor soil not suitable for other crops. In many cases, afforestation or complete abandonment of the soil would be necessary. In such cases financial compensations for the growers of the bush would be required.

18. Several other activities were discussed by which the former growers of the bush and other members of the highland population might earn a satisfactory livelihood. Animal husbandry was suggested in view of the shortage of protein foods in these regions. It was however mentioned that not all parts of the highlands concerned were suitable for cattle raising which could be carried on more economically in other parts of the national territory.

19. The development of non-agricultural activities such as handicrafts and industrial enterprises to substitute for coca bush growing was discussed. Pre-investment problems such as the construction of transportation facilities were taken into account. The problem of resettlement of highland inhabitants, particularly of those for whom no satisfactory substitute livelihood could be found and the difficulties inherent in such population transfers were examined.

20. Various educational problems were studied. The importance of improved general education, in particular that of elimination of illiteracy and of occupational training, for the raising of living standards, was emphasised. Better educational standards would also be helpful in efforts to convince the highland Indians of the harmful character of their chewing. The usefulness of nutrition education and of propaganda intended to create an atmosphere favourable to the abolition of coca leaf chewing was also stressed. The Seminar expressed its strong view that the payment of wages in coca leaves should not be tolerated and should be subject to effective penal sanctions.

21. The need for improvement of public health services was discussed. The lack of facilities for satisfactory and healthy leisure time activities was mentioned. It was generally agreed that the development of community life would constitute an important weapon in the campaign against the coca leaf chewing. Attention should also be given to the medical, social and moral rehabilitation of coca leaf chewers.

22. The group was of the opinion that in taking economic and social measures such as those referred to above, Governments should be aware of the necessity and of their duty to integrate the highland Indian in the economic and social life of their nations. National and international efforts on the lines of the present Andean Indian Programme were commended and should be increased.

23. The Seminar was of the opinion that the abolition of coca leaf chewing and the reduction of coca leaf production to the quantities needed for medical, scientific and other legitimate purposes, was not only in the national interest, but would also constitute an act of international solidarity with the countries which were victims of the international cocaine traffic. Without the abolition of the chewing and the controlled limitation of coca leaf production to legitimate requirements a really successful campaign against this traffic was very difficult indeed, if not impossible.

24. The Consultative Group was aware of and wished to commend the great efforts made by the governments concerned to advance the economic and social well-being of their populations and in particular also of their indigenous inhabitants. It recognized, however, also the great difficulties involved. It expressed its satisfaction that all governments concerned had adopted as their policy the aim of prohibiting coca leaf chewing and of reducing coca leaf production to the quantities needed for legitimate purposes. The members of the Seminar agreed that while it was desirable to achieve this aim as speedily as feasible, a gradual approach towards this goal would have to be taken in those countries which had a particularly serious coca leaf problem.

It was mentioned in this connexion that the aim of overall reduction of coca leaf production did not exclude some extension of the cultivation of such varieties of the bush as were particularly suitable for the extraction of cocaine for medical purposes or for the preparation of the flavouring agent used in the manufacture of beverages.

25. The Group was also of the opinion that effective control of coca leaf production required the establishment of national monopolies which should have the exclusive right of licensing coca bush cultivators, of designating the plots on which the bush may be grown, of buying the crops and of the wholesale and international trade in the coca leaves. It was agreed that the creation of such a complete monopoly was not immediately possible where the necessary administrative conditions did not yet exist. The Group reviewed with appreciation the measures taken (cadastral survey, census of coca bush plants) and organizational structures erected by governments with a view to establishing complete coca leaf monopolies.

26. The participants in the Seminar, however, considered that immediate and strong measures must be taken to intensify the fight against the illicit traffic in cocaine, to improve international co-operation among the Governments concerned and with the United Nations and Interpol and to ensure the effective punishment of illicit traffickers.

27. The Seminar noted that the Governments concerned often did not have sufficient means (financial and otherwise) to carry out the necessary economic and social measures, to make up the loss in tax revenue, to compensate landowners, etc.

It was generally agreed that international financial and technical assistance would urgently be needed. Not only the help of international organizations of public law should be enlisted, but also that of individual governments and private non-profit organizations willing to help. It was pointed out in this connexion that food supplied from resources of the UNO-FAO World Food programme would be very helpful in the transitional period of shifting from coca bush cultivation to other crops. The assistance given by international organizations in the implementation of the Andean Indian programme was specially appreciated.

It would also be helpful in this context if Governments would only permit the import of coca leaves produced in Bolivia or Peru or of crude cocaine manufactured in these countries. The reduction of coca leaf production in the countries concerned should also not be offset by the commencement of, or increase in, coca leaf production elsewhere.

Several participants of the Seminar, however, called the attention of the Group to the fact that the means of international organizations for assistance were limited and that it could be expected that the assistance which would be given by friendly foreign governments would, however generous, also be relatively modest. The governments having a coca leaf problem would therefore have to rely primarily on their own resources.

28. The need for co-ordinating national and international efforts and means as well as for enlisting public opinion of the countries concerned, of the region and of the whole world was also emphasized. National Committees composed of representatives of all government departments in question and of interested private organizations should be established to this end. In these programmes of co-ordinated action, the needs of the indigenous population should particularly be kept in mind. Periodical conferences of American States should be held to review the progress made in the field.

29. It was recommended that the Governments concerned make expert surveys of their existing programmes of economic and social development with a view to determining whether the measures already adopted or planned were sufficient, or would have to be modified or supplemented by additional steps in the light of the special features of the coca leaf question. It was also realized that the measures taken would often have to be different not only from country to

country, but also from district to district in the same country, e.g. a substitute crop for the coca bush or a new industry which would be suitable in one district would sometimes not do in another district. The surveys should therefore be directed to the special needs of particular coca leaf producing or coca leaf chewing districts.

30. After these surveys have been completed, national conferences in the countries principally concerned should be called for the purpose of adopting a co-ordinated national programme of action. These conferences should be composed of all national departments concerned. Representatives of interested international organizations, of foreign governments willing to assist, of the church and of private organizations capable of making a contribution, should also be permitted to participate in these conferences. In view of the limited means which may be available, the national conferences may decide to concentrate action on particular districts.